

Multi-polarity Does Not Equal an Anti-U.S. Position

Wang Yizhou; Research Fellow, Institute of World Economy and Politics,
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

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Summary:

- Our diplomatic and international strategies are still lacking systematic planning and long-term, medium-term and short-term goals. Many of our diplomatic gestures and actions, although not flawed, appear largely to be “knee-jerk” reactions.
- In a long-term view, Sino-American relations are bound to go through periods of friction and clashes, but they will not necessarily lead to war. We must not harbor unrealistic expectations or be overtly pessimistic.
- The untrusting relations between China and Japan have deep roots on the social and mass levels; therefore, the aim in our relationship with Japan should, and can only be, “to try to be amicable neighbors, if not good friends.”
- The Russian mentality of wanting to be a world superpower is a double-edged sword, so we have to make clear assessments of the Sino-Russian relationship and try to avoid the sharp blade while making the best of possible advantages.

The concept of multi-polarity is no longer new today, but it does not mean that all the correct answers have been found to all the questions involved. From my view at least, it is still necessary to think further about it. There is no strict pecking order in arranging the following topics. They fall roughly into the categories of “Basic Situation”, “Principles and Objectives,” and “Strategies and Tactics.”

1. Scholars of international politics both inside and outside China have found it relatively easy to come to a consensus on the following issues. First, for a considerable period of time into the future (at least for a generation), the basic order in international relations of “one super power in juxtaposition with a group of powerful countries” will not undergo fundamental changes. The world order is still decided by major strategic nations and regions such as the United States, Europe, Japan, Russia and China. The United States will still be the only global superpower. Second, the worldwide trend of peace and development will not be reversed, and the possibility of a major war happening (including the possibility of a nuclear war) is still very slim. Third, whether it is for the purpose of achieving peace or development, scientific and technological advances--along with educational investments that serve as their foundation--will be the first and foremost

important factor and the crucial “vantage point” for the survival of all countries.

2. Scholars of international politics have also come to a consensus on the following topics, although not without some ambiguous variables. First, occasional frictions between major countries are inevitable, and clashes between various countries’ national interests will never completely disappear. It happens between nations with significant cultural, ideological and social-structural differences. Even between countries with many similarities, frictions are still unavoidable and beyond the control of human nature. However, in the new climate of globalization during the post-Cold War era, important new characteristics and new trends have emerged in the interrelations between major world players. First, frictions have not stopped cooperation, and the cooperative rather than confrontational approach to solving conflicts has gained much more ground. Second, after the Soviet Union collapsed, the definitions of “enemy, us and our friends” have become much more blurred in international relations. The Cold War logic of “if you are not with us, you are against us” and “kill or get killed” has been seriously eroded. Third, the relativity of national interests and conflicts between nations has become more apparent. The enemy of yesterday might become a friend today; and today’s competitor might become a partner tomorrow. Fourth, in international relations, the “policy of the marginalization of war” is still proving to be effective and has the potential to be adopted even more extensively. That is to say that the threat of deterrence is more frequently used and proves to be more effective than the actual enacting of deterrence (e.g. military actions or sanctions). Fifth, since the end of the Cold War, international systems, organizations, regulations and international laws have gained noticeable significance in international affairs, a reflection of the inter-dependent equilibrium of a globalized age. These multi-lateral interactive mechanisms have become strong new players in international politics. On many occasions, major countries would prefer this multi-lateral approach to a unilateral one.

3. We must admit that at present China’s international strategy is far from systemic or fully developed. It is quite unlike our domestic reforms, where we have already formed a general blueprint such as “legality in ruling the country”, “market economy”, “construction of spiritual civilization” and “a sustainable development strategy”, together with a series of integrated measures (e.g. reforms of state-owned enterprises, reforms in housing systems, reforms in grain distribution and circulation, reforms in finance and foreign trade). In the field of foreign policies, although we also have a set of existing guidelines (e.g. the five principles of peaceful co-existence, anti-hegemonism, and a general foreign policy of independence and self-reliance), they are generally too superficial and only offer “rough outlines” lacking corresponding key links and specific strategic measures. We must say that, compared with countries with strong traditions of international strategic thinking such as the United States, Russia and France, we lack a systemic diplomatic and international strategy that consists of a whole set of long-term, medium-term and short-term objectives. Many of our diplomatic gestures and actions, although not flawed, seem largely to be “knee-jerk” reactions. Communication and coordination between diplomatic, academic and strategic sectors inside and outside China are far from being satisfactory. This situation is entirely out of tune with China’s position as a country with a long history, strong civilized traditions and a vast population. It also

does not match China's growing international status and its international responsibilities .

4. One of the basic goals of multi-polarity is to prevent the United States from becoming the one and only hegemonic power in the world and to preempt its possible negative impact or pressures on China. However, to correctly address the relationship between the United States and China is one of the most important ways leading towards multi-polarity. In the medium to long-term view, the United States will undoubtedly maintain its position as the number one superpower in the world. For a considerable period of time, the United States will continue to be a major influencing factor in international relations and our relations with foreign countries. The main pressure we are facing in our rise in the world also comes from the United States. In the long-term view, Sino-American relations will inevitably go through periods of friction and clashes, but they will not necessarily lead to war. We must not harbor illusions about that, or be overtly pessimistic. We must make adequate estimates about the complex and double-sided nature of U.S. policies on China. For instance, on the issue of Taiwan, we must be aware of the inevitable ambiguity in U.S. policies (i.e. to encourage negotiation but not unification; to push for peace but not cooperation; to actually oppose Taiwan's independence but refuse to publicly clarify its position). We must especially stress the point in our international propaganda that promoting multi-polarity does not equal an anti-American position (although the actual effect will inevitably weaken the position of the United States as THE supreme power). That is to say that the fact we seek multi-polarity does not mean that we will do everything to pose " open opposition" to the United States. What we are saying is that multi-polarity is a natural and inevitable requirement of a globalized economy where countries are inter-dependent for existence and development. Otherwise, China's advocacy of multi-polarity will not win recognition and support from countries (such as France and many developing nations) that equally favor multi-polarity.

5. Japan, Western Europe and Russia are the main geological strategic centers of resistance in the modern multi-polar structure of international relations; they should also be the major target areas in our strategies of multi-polarity. The untrusting relations between China and Japan have deep roots on the social and mass levels, so the aim in our Japan strategies should be, and can only be, "to try to be amicable neighbors, if not good friends." We must attempt to avoid outside force or minor incidences from interfering with the overall situation. One thing we must remember firmly is that under no circumstances will the Japanese give up its alliance with the United States, as the alliance is the basis of their nation building in the post-war era. Western Europe is the most integrated region in the world and will no doubt play an increasingly significant role in international politics, whether it acts as a whole, or as individual voices (e.g. Germany and France). But because of Western Europe's distance from China (both geologically and culturally), we have to try to win its cooperation on the one hand, and on the other hand, be realistic about the scope and impact of the cooperation. In other words, West Europe is an important target area, but not the focal point in our strategies of multi-polarity. Russia's vitality has been seriously impaired and its post-Cold War decline will probably continue for a long period of time. Russian President Yeltzin in recent years has initiated many friendly gestures to China, but many Russian diplomatic tactics sometimes benefit China and are sometimes detrimental. The Russian world-power mentality is a double-

edged sword, so we have to make clear-headed estimates about the future prospects of Sino-Russia relations in order to avoid the blade and use our strengths to our advantage. The most urgent task at present is to prevent a "vacuum" in our cooperative partnership with Russia, so that the public in both countries and international opinion will not play down this relationship.

6. China is located in the Asia Pacific area, and the Asia Pacific region is our main source in attracting technology, investment and modern management methodology from the outside world. Therefore, the Asia Pacific region is the starting point and center of resistance in mapping out our strategic blueprint with foreign countries. It also provides the most important geological and political environment outside China for our reforms, our policy of opening to the outside world and stability in our development. To maintain good relations with our neighboring countries, especially with countries in the Asia Pacific region, is and has always been our most important diplomatic task. In a new and multi-polar environment, our guidelines of "maintaining friendly relations with our neighbors and stabilizing relationship with other surrounding countries" should not only be continued, they should even push for China to "exert greater influence and become a leading force." We should strive to make our voice heard more in the regional affairs.

7. There is one point that we need to clarify here: in the same way that we should not mix multi-polarity with an anti-American stand, we should equally not confuse efforts to take the leadership role with attempts at hegemonism. We must place special emphasis on this distinction in our foreign propaganda work. Of course China is strongly opposed to any form of hegemonism and power politics in international relations. But it does not mean that we do not expect to maintain our voice and influence on many international, especially regional issues, or even take up a leadership position in certain situations (such as in APEC, Korean Peninsula and Indo-China issues.) We object to the United States' willful interference in the domestic affairs of other countries, but it does not mean that we are against all of U.S.-led multilateral and other international actions. No true world power or regional power will fail to attempt to be a dominant player of sorts in international or regional affairs through their political declarations and actual diplomatic actions. The measurement of our opposition to hegemonism and power politics should be based on whether the actual effect of such actions is detrimental to world peace and stability, to prosperity and development of human kind, and to the sovereignty rights and independence of various countries. As a matter of fact, China's stress on multi-polarity is in itself an attempt at leading to a mentality in international, inter-country relations that is beneficial for the new century and different from the "Cold War logic".

8. To look at it from a short-term point of view, the basic objective of China's advocacy of multi-polarity is to prevent a situation where one country (the United States) dominates international affairs (openly declared principle); at the same time, it is also to avoid various serious pressures on China as a result of the one-country dominance (internal measurement). To consider it from a medium-term point of view, we seek to make peace and development the main stable goals for mankind in a new century and indeed all countries in the world, based on a relative equilibrium of balances among major countries. The long-term view is that, as a strong and prosperous socialist China, we have

to reform a world economic and political order that is unreasonable and illogical so that we can push for further progress in the international society. One thing we must be aware of: the world order where the United States and the West apparently are the dominant force has its characteristic rules and orders that, although clearly unreasonable and unfair by nature, do present certain easy "benefits" and advantages", including providing the "benefit of an easy ride" for China. We should not repel and reject everything outright. We should create such an image in the minds of the world: the Chinese advocacy of multipolarity does not aim to eliminate all existing orders and mindlessly encourage "the simultaneous arising of multiple powers fighting meaningless battles." We are trying to affect gradual and steady reforms to the existing world economic and political order, on the basis of overall peace and development. In doing so, we shall "maintain reason, best interest and restraint." There is an ancient saying that goes: "the most superior military strategy is one that foils the plot, the second best choice is to tackle through diplomacy, the third choice is to battle with soldiers, and worst strategy is to attack their towns." We ought to learn from these lessons of wisdom in our attempts to "break the old and build the new" in international politics.